

Most Endangered Buildings

St. Joseph is blessed with an impressive stock of historic architecture. Many of our historic buildings are well preserved and are wonderful examples of the history of the city. Others, however, have been permitted to fall into disrepair. Periodically the Landmark Commission has issued a “Most Endangered” list of properties. What follows is an expansion of those lists, beginning with the most recent, providing information on the history of the building and information concerning its status as of 2021.

If you have a building that you would like to nominate for the next “Most Endangered” list, please contact the Historic Preservation Planner’s Office. <https://www.stjoemo.info/271/Historic-Preservation>

2016

Missouri Valley Trust Building, 102 South 4th Street.

Some buildings are quite simply iconic. The Missouri Valley Trust at 4th and Felix Streets is one of those. This building is reputed to be the oldest bank building in continuous use west of the Mississippi River (1859-1989).

It was built in 1859 as the site of the St. Joseph branch of the Bank of the State of Missouri, making it one of the few antebellum structures still standing in the city. This initial structure cost \$25,000. The contract to build the bank was awarded to Joseph Pfeiffer, a young, ambitious German immigrant who won the awarding committee over with his plaster-of-paris model of the structure. Pfeiffer went on to become one of the leading stonework artisans in the city and the elaborate arching entrance on the northwest corner of the building is a testament to his ability. From 1900 to 1989 the Missouri Valley Trust Company occupied the building.

Remarkably the original interior of the building is intact; stepping inside is like going back 100 years. It is popularly asserted Jesse James was intending to rob the bank, but his plan was thwarted by his murder. The building also makes an appearance in the movie *Paper Moon*.

The Missouri Valley Trust Building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Unfortunately, after a short stint as home to American Shaman, a CBD retailer, the property is once again vacant. It is showing clear signs of deferred maintenance and still belongs on a list of endangered St. Joseph structures.



A.K. Pickle Residence, 224 East Missouri Street. This property was purchased by Abraham K. Pickle on September 11, 1900. He then had a charming two-story frame Queen Anne house built on the lot. Abraham, a foreman at the St. Joseph Stockyards and later a locomotive engineer, and his wife Angelia. They lived here with their children: Alice M. and Laura M., both of whom were students at Platt's Community College who went on to become stenographers, and Fred A.. Abraham was born on Nov. 9, 1844 in Paris, MO and served in the Union Army. When the war ended he came to St. Joseph where he married Angelia V. Montague on November 17, 1869. He owned the house free of mortgage and lived here until his death on December 29, 1935. His wife Angelia who was born in Iowa City, Iowa on Oct. 11, 1854 died in the home of heart disease on Nov. 2, 1933. Following the death Abraham and Angelia, their daughters Alice and Laura, neither of whom married, continued to live in the home. Their brother Fred, who worked as a coal and ice salesman and later as a policeman, died at the State Hospital in 1947 where he had been for 5 years due to psychosis. Laura died on May 16, 1951 at the house of acute heart failure; she had worked for years as a stenographer of a wholesale creamery company and later as a clerk for Brown Transfer & Storage Company. Her older sister Alice, employed by the Empire Trust Co., remained in the home until her death in April 1964.

The Pickles sometimes took in boarders. In 1905 there was a bit of scandal associated with one of their lodgers. A young couple Conrad and Jessie Keuchlerm Jordan were boarding at the house while Conrad was in town working as an electrician for the Missouri and Kansas Telephone Company. There was a telephone workers strike and Jessie left town to visit her mother in St. Louis while it went on, leaving her husband in St. Joseph. Conrad was killed by a live wire on Aug. 29, 1905. After his death it emerged he had been married twice, but had not divorced his first wife before marrying Jessie. Jessie sued the telephone company for \$5,000 in damages stemming from Conrad's death, but the company asserted she was not his legal wife and thus had no claim. There was then a drawn out legal battle in which Jessie's attorneys sought to prove Conrad's first marriage was not valid (as his first wife had not legally divorced her first husband) and Jessie was thus the legal widow. In 1907 the Court of Appeals ruled against Jessie, stating her marriage was not legal.

The property remained in the Pickle family until 1965 when it was sold to the Ladies Union Benevolent Association on July 9, 1965. The Association sold it to August Wesley Newell almost immediately on August 11, 1965. Sadly the house was badly neglected and has been demolished.



2517 Lafayette Street

Built around 1905, the duplex at 2517/19 Lafayette served as home for many families over its 115-year life span. These families represent the varied industries and endeavors which fueled the economic growth of the city. One of the first recorded occupants was Forest E. Fleming and his wife Alice. The couple were both born in Ohio, but had married in St. Joseph in 1894. Forest was the president of the Fleming Commission Company, located in room 2 of the Corby Building. It was this company which provided to the newspaper the prices at which grain and other commodities were trading. In 1917, Frank L. Endebrock lived at 2519. Endebrock was the son of Frederick Endebrock who operated one of the most successful trunk manufacturing concerns in the nation, specializing in sample trunks for salesmen. Frank followed in his father's footsteps and continued the operation, opening a retail store on 8th Street between Felix and Edmond. During the Prohibition era, two men who were involved in the "soft drink" and "amusement" industry lived in 2519. In 1921, Charles L. Coy had a soft drink establishment at 1001 N. 3rd St., the current site of the American Tavern in the neighborhood of Robidoux Row. Joseph Peter Katke, a bartender for the Apex-Buffalo Amusement Co. lived here with his wife Anna and daughter Clara in 1929. Katke was a prominent figure among the many bartenders of the city, serving as head of their union several times.

Two men who served during the Second World War listed the duplex as their home address. Staff Sergeant Francis J. Merscher served as a gunner on a Billy Mitchell B-25 which "scored heavily.... in a recent daylight sweep in the South Pacific. This crew accounted for the following damage: one merchant ship and one 50-foot steel cargo carrier left dead and burning in the water; 12 cargo barges and two sampans used for transporting troops as well as supplies, badly damaged by bombing and strafing; a Japanese warehouse on Ceram Island strafed and set afire." Merscher was a veteran of the "fightin' 13th's" campaigns against the Bismarck Archipelago and Rabaul. He was awarded the Air Medal and the Purple Heart. Merscher was not the only hero at the Duplex, Tec. 4th Grade Robert L. Davis, serving with the 6th Armored Division in Germany, was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for meritorious service.

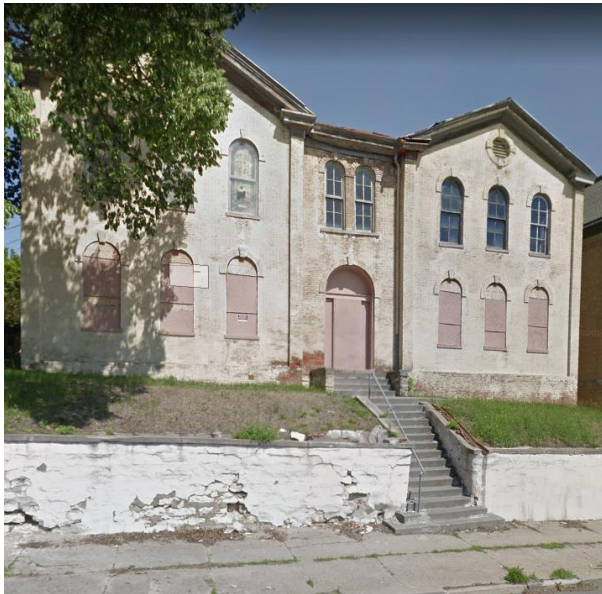
In recent decades the duplex has fallen on hard times and was slated for demolition by Habitat for Humanity. It dodged the threat, but is still a distressed property.



Queen of the Apostles Religious Education Center, 509 South 10th Street —

One of the most striking buildings on the St. Joseph skyline is the Queen of the Apostles Church, popularly known as Twin Spires. In the late 19th century, this church served the large Catholic population living in the heart of city. The Italianate structure at 509 South 10th is a part of the church complex and was built in about 1880. It was a part of the church complex built by Monsignor Christopher Linnenkamp during his long time at the diocese. This structure was used as an education building, but when the area changed, reducing the number of parishioners, the entire complex fell on hard times.

The church and associated buildings were purchased by owners who bought many properties around the city and allowed them to fall into disrepair. The complex has a new owner, but this particular structure remains threatened by insensitive restoration.



624 North 8th Street

This charming little frame house was built in the 1880s and is a contributing structure in the Hall Street Historic District. In 1884, the John F. Tyler House Renting Agency listed it for rent for \$16.00 per month. They described it as “Frame house 5 rooms” but did note it had a cistern. In 1915, John Q. Morrow, the manager of the S.S. Allen Grocery Company lived here. He became slightly famous for feeding the birds on 7th Street between Faraon and Edmond. In 1905 Mary and Harriet Clarke lived here. Mary was a dressmaker and Harriet a teacher at Floyd School, at 2316 S. 3rd Street (now owned by the city of St. Joseph and used by the Water Department). In the 1980s, it underwent extensive renovation but since then it has been allowed to fall into disrepair.



The Dimbleby/McKnight Duplex, 1402 Felix –

Built around 1914 by Helen Leach Dimbleby and her son-in-law Robert M. McKnight, this brick duplex began life as a single-family home. Helen was born in St. Joseph in 1860 to Dr. William L. Leach and Lucelle Massie Leach. She married Charles Dimbleby in 1879. The Gazette-Herald carried the following story: “Thursday afternoon Rev. M.K. Miller joined in the holy bonds of wedlock, Mr. Chas. Dimbleby and Miss Helen Leach, daughter of the well-known Dr. Leach of this city. The ceremony was performed at the residence of the bride’s parents, Francis between 13th and 14th streets, and was witnessed only by immediate friends of the parities. . . The presents were many and valuable. Mr. Dimbleby is a young gentleman from Peoria, at which place he met the lady of his choice, while the latter was there on a visit to relatives. His father is a well-known capitalist, and this match may be set down for a good one for either side. The couple left on the eight o’clock train Thursday night for Chicago, which they will make their future home.” What the newspaper does not mention is Charles was a baggage man on the railroad (so perhaps not such a good match) and it does not seem the marriage was a great success – in 1889 Helen was living with her parents at 1208 Francis and Charles died the following year in Peoria. Like many women of the era, Helen did not have much of an education; the 1940 census states she had a 5th grade education. Her daughter Donna married the travelling shoe salesman Robert McKnight on Dec. 27, 1899.

The Dimbleby/McKnights owned the house until about 1939. From the evidence in the City Directories it appears they began to rent it out in the early 1920s. In the 1924 Directory Helen and Robert are listed as living at 1402 ½ Felix, and 1402 is occupied by James and Jennie Strike. James was a chemist for the St. Joseph Light, Heat & Power Co. From that point on, there were multiple families living in the home. Among the occupants were Ida M. Gordon Chappelle, a widow who was working as a waitress at Wheeler’s Jerome Café earning \$520 per year. In January 1944, in the middle of the night a fire started in the basement of the home and the six occupants had to flee into the street in their nightclothes; no one was hurt but one of the bedrooms was badly damaged and the entire structure was smoke damaged. Over the years this house, like so many rental structures, suffered from deferred maintenance. In the summer of 2020 it appears some work is being done on the structure, but it is vacant. It is a contributing structure in the Museum Hill Historic District.



2015

C.D. Smith Building, 313 S. 3rd Street.

This absolutely stunning warehouse building was constructed in 1888 by the C.D. Smith company for a whopping \$25,000 (approximately \$645,000 in 2021 dollars). The company remained in the building until it moved in 1994. The C.D. Smith drug company built its reputation by supplying independent pharmacies and drug stores.

Like so many of the iconic structures of St. Joseph, the C.D. Smith building was designed by E.J. Eckel (at this time the firm was Eckel and Mann) in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. It is built of red brick with dazzling terra cotta details - perhaps most striking is the forceful cat emblazoned above the southeast corner of the structure. The terra cotta for the structure was purchased from the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company; George Mann travelled to Chicago personally in the late summer of 1888 to make the purchase. The stone for the building came from Joliet. Eckel and Mann employed Abercrombie and Son to do the stonework.

In recent decades this amazing structure has been badly neglected and allegedly used to store hazardous chemicals.





The Lucy Wilson Duplex, 418-420 S. 10th Street.

The Lucy Wilson Duplex at 418-420 S. 10th was on the Most Endangered list more than once, including in 2007.

Built in about 1886 as a duplex, the lovely Queen Anne structure sat diagonally across S. 10th Street from Twin Spires, giving it one of the best views in the city. Among its earliest occupants were the members of William Wilson's family. William, like so many in St. Joseph in the 1880s, worked for the railroads; he was a clerk and ticket auditor for the Kansas City, St. Joseph, and Council Bluffs Railroad.

The exterior of this brick residence had multiple bay windows and the window and door hoods were decorated with brick and stone ornaments. The house originally had two 8-room units which were mirror images of one another. They each had an entrance hall opening into a double parlor divided by pocket doors.

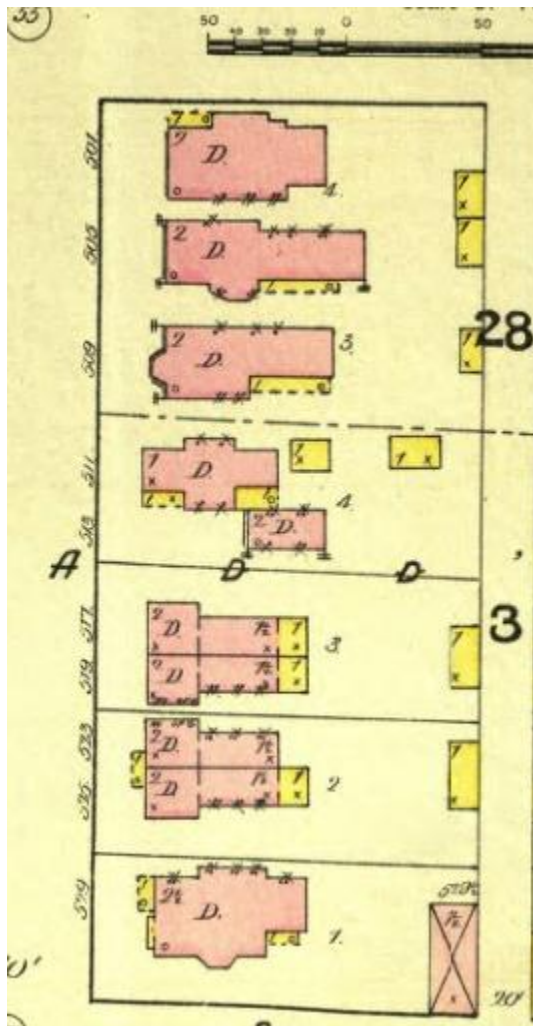
Like so many of the larger houses in St. Joseph, this one was subdivided into several apartments and badly neglected. In 2018, after attempting to sell – or even give away – the structure, the owner demolished the building.



500 Block of S. 9th St, 505, 509, and 511 13 S. 9th Street.

This block at the heart of the Museum Hill Historic District once was densely occupied with seven residences – 5 single family and 2 duplexes; as of 2021 only four remain standing. In the late 19th and early 20th century, many of these were home to recent Russian/German immigrants. Several of the early families employed female African American servants who lived in the homes. 505 was the childhood home of Leo Lowenberg, most famous as the founder of the Paris clothing store, for many years a fixture in downtown.

As of 2021, the block remains distressed. Sadly, 505 S. 9th suffered a fire in 2016 and was demolished in 2018. The structures at 505 and 511 are vacant and in real need of some TLC



1888 Sanborn Map





Livestock Exchange Building, 601 Illinois Avenue.

The Livestock Exchange Building is a regular entrant on the Most Endangered list and was placed on the statewide Places in Peril list in 2015. This is one of those structures nearly everyone agrees should be saved, but no one seems to have the means or the courage to do the saving.

This stunning neo-classical structure was designed by E.J. Eckel to embody the importance of the livestock industry to the booming city just before the turn of the 20th century. Completed in 1898 and opened with great fanfare, the Exchange stood proudly at the heart of the stockyards district for more than 50 years before the packing houses closed and the building was permitted to fall into disrepair.

This building has endured abuse that would bring lesser structures to the ground. It is still standing, but it becomes more fragile with each season's weather.



photo by Bob Travaglione

Jennings-Comstock House, 602 N. 5th Street.

The Jennings-Comstock House is proof that being associated with one of St. Joseph's most famous literary figures, Eugene Field, is not sufficient to help preserve a structure. This impressive house sitting on the bluff on Robidoux Hill was the site of the wedding reception for Field and Julia Comstock in 1873.

The house was built around 1856 for Joseph B. Jennings, the proprietor of J.B. Jennings & Co. who made his fortune in the wholesale grocery business supplying the travelers heading west. In more recent years the house has been converted into apartments and has sat vacant and neglected. In 2021 efforts are being made to stabilize the structure and find an appropriate reuse for it.



Saints Peter and Paul Church, 604 S. 20th St.

SS. Peter and Paul Church, also known as the “Polish Church,” was built at the beginning of the 20th century when the Polish community that had been worshipping at the Immaculate Conception Church decided to build their own church. Joseph M. Massard was the contractor. The dedication ceremony on May 7, 1905 drew a crowd of more than 2,000. The News Press wrote of it, “It is the only Polish Church in northwest Missouri and is one of the most sightly edifices in the state. It was recently completed at a cost of \$30,000 excusive of foundation and site.”

It remained its own active parish until 1978 when it closed and the congregation merged with Immaculate Conception. The altars were moved to Immaculate Conception, which was renamed Queen of the Apostles. The building then housed small congregations and was permitted to decay. In 2021 it houses the Faith Family Worship Center, an important center for the African American community in St. Joseph.



Farber – Schuster – Farrish House, 703 Hall St.

The Farber-Schuster-Farrish House is a contributing structure in the Hall Street Historic District. This stunning Italianate mansion was designed by L.S. Stigers (best known for designing the Patee House Hotel) and built between 1878 and 1881 for Adam Schuster. Schuster, born in 1837 in Prussia, had immigrated to the United States in 1857 to join his uncle's retail establishment in Savannah, MO. In 1865, Adam moved to St. Joseph and became active in several wholesale trading firms before opening his own, A.N. Schuster and Co. His interests extended into banking and livestock interests in Texas and Arizona. Schuster's financial success did not survive the nation-wide business panic of 1893, and he sold his grand home to William W. Wheeler, a leading wholesale merchant who lived in the home until his death in 1925.

The house is made of sandstone which has been carved with fanciful ornamentation. The roof is surmounted with an ornate belvedere giving stunning views of the city. Despite occasional efforts to restore the house, it has suffered over the years from deferred maintenance.



George Bode Italianate Houses, 709 & 715 S. 9th St.

Around 1885, George Bode Sr., a moderately prosperous saloon-keeper built two brick Italianate houses on S. 9th Street. He and his family lived at 715 while 709 was an income-producing property.

Bode was born in Hessen Germany in 1839 and came to the United States in 1859. He went into business with Fred Stephen, opening the Buffalo saloon at 412 Edmond. He and his wife Eleanor Wenz had three children: George Jr., Arthur, and Meta. Arthur died in 1899 of peritonitis after having served in the U.S. calvary in the Philippines. He had returned to St. Joseph and gone to work as a yard man in the Stock yards when he suddenly became ill and died. Meta married Dr. Levi S. Long, a prominent city physician and surgeon. The Longs with their two daughters lived in the home with George Sr. until his death in 1920.

The name of George Bode Jr. is well-known in St. Joseph. He worked as an accountant and bank examiner and through shrewd investing amassed a sizeable fortune by the time of his death in 1955. The Bode Trust, established after his death, has been a major source of funds for the city park department.

These two houses have suffered from neglect and vandalism for the past several decades. In 2021, they are still standing, but continue to be seriously endangered.



McDonald Duplex, 819-21 N. 9th St.

In about 1885, prosperous merchant Rufus L. McDonald built an elegant Queen Anne duplex next door to his substantial 12-room mansion. The duplex was intended to serve as an upscale rental property.

Rufus McDonald came to St. Joseph in 1851 as a young man of 19 seeking his fortune in the booming mercantile trade supplying people going west in the gold rush. He went to work in the firm of Donell and Saxton and two years later was made a partner in the firm. In 1857, Donell and Saxton proposed that McDonald buy them out of the business as they had other enterprises they wished to follow. He was able to afford the purchase, just barely, thanks in part to his advantageous marriage to Mary Ann Wilson, the daughter of Brigadier General Robert Wilson. It is often said that war is good for business, this was certainly the case for Rufus. In 1864 he shipped supplies to the US military presidio in San Francisco. The profits from this deal enabled him to purchase a large stock of goods that formed the basis for the creation of R.L. McDonald & Company in 1865. McDonald's business prospered and in 1880 he constructed a 70,000 square foot warehouse at 202 N. 4th St. In 1886 he converted the Patee House hotel into a clothing manufacturing operation.

This great wealth enabled him to build his impressive mansion on 9th St. Sadly, that home has been lost. The duplex he built is still standing but remains in extraordinarily bad shape. In 2021 it is owned by an out-of-town investment company that owns other distressed properties (including Washington School below).



Colbert (Garth) House, 817 Hall St.

This imposing red brick Italianate, also known as the Garth House, is among the oldest on Hall Street. The oldest part of the house was built by Arthur Kirkpatrick in 1869. He was a teacher before he moved to St. Joseph where he went into the produce business and later turned his hand to insurance. He made a major alteration to the home in 1887. In 1905 his son-in-law J.J. Garth took out a permit to make another major addition. He made a major addition to the home Arthur's daughter Alice, who was raised in the home, married James J. Garth, the son of Maj. Samuel Garth. Alice and her children remained in the home until 1960 when it was sold. In the decades following the sale, the house was subject to neglect that resulted in catastrophic roof failure. The water incursion was so significant that it caused the collapse of the main staircase and many of the floors.

Happily, in 2021 the Garth House is undergoing a sensitive restoration. It was the recipient of a Save Our Heritage Grant in 2020 and its future appears bright indeed!



Keyhole House, 1013 Angelique

This charming Queen Anne house was built in 1890 for William H. Hinds, a merchant specializing in stoves and tinware. William and his large extended family lived in the home until his death in 1914, and his widow Susan remained in the home continuing the pattern they had established as early as 1910 of taking in boarders. This tradition continued following Mrs. Hinds' death. Over the years the house was allowed to deteriorate until it was slated for demolition in 2015. Sadly, just as a plan was being put into action to save it from demolition, it burned to the ground in 2015.



Marshall-Runcie Residence, 1617 Faraon St.

Few houses have a more impressive resume than the white frame house at 1617 Faraon. This once lovely structure was built in 1885 for William St. John Elliot Marshall and his wife Constance Runcie (the daughter of the founder of the Runcie Club). The Marshalls were the parents of Elliot Marshall Jr., who served as the Mayor of St. Joseph from 1914-1922. This remained the home of the Marshalls until the 1940s. After the death of Mrs. Marshall in a tragic fire at the neighboring house (1619 Faraon shared a lot with 1617 and had been built by Mrs. Marshall's mother, Constance Runcie after her husband died), the house became a multi-family dwelling and began to deteriorate.

This house was the recipient of a Save Our Heritage Grant in 2005, but the rehabilitation has never been completed and it continues to sit in a sad state on what was clearly once a lovely corner lot.



William Meek House, 1707 Faraon St.

Built around 1890 and substantially altered in 1955; despite decades of neglect it is possible to see the lovely house this once was. The first recorded occupant of 1707 was Matthew F. Myers and his family. Meyers was born in England and he worked at various bookkeeping jobs and as an insurance agent. For a short period at the beginning of the 20th century, the house was occupied by Jacob Feltenstein, who worked as a travelling agent for the liquor wholesaler Ferdinand Westheimer. Jacob and his wife Rose were Russian immigrant who fled the anti-Semitic laws of Russia. Perhaps the most famous of the occupants of this house was Minetry Jones – the president and treasurer of Jones Hat Company located at 118/20 N. 3rd Street. In addition to his importance in local business, he was known as one of the most prominent Baptist laymen in the state. By the early 1940s, the property had been divided into apartments.

In recent years it has been allowed to continue to deteriorate and is still poorly maintained.



Washington School, 1015 N. 5th St.

E.J. Eckel is best known for his designs of many of the grandest houses in St. Joseph, but it is important to remember that he would design nearly any type of structure if he was paid. At the turn of the 20th century, he was doing a great deal of work for the St. Joseph School District. The city was growing rapidly and that necessitated the building of several new school buildings. One of those was a reconstruction and expansion of the Washington School. The contract for the school was awarded in the Summer of 1909 for \$48,700. For decades Washington School was the heart of its working-class neighborhood. It had an active parent organization that sponsored many events. Washington's fate was tied to the growth – or lack – of the neighborhood. In 1926 an addition to the school was part of the large school bond. Unfortunately in the post-war period, the neighborhood fell victim to redlining and the population dwindled. In 1973 the school board decided to close the school. It had a one-year stay as a short-term middle school while Robidoux School was being completed, but that was its last academic year. Since that time, it was apartments and home to various short-lived businesses. It has deteriorated badly and there seems to be little hope.

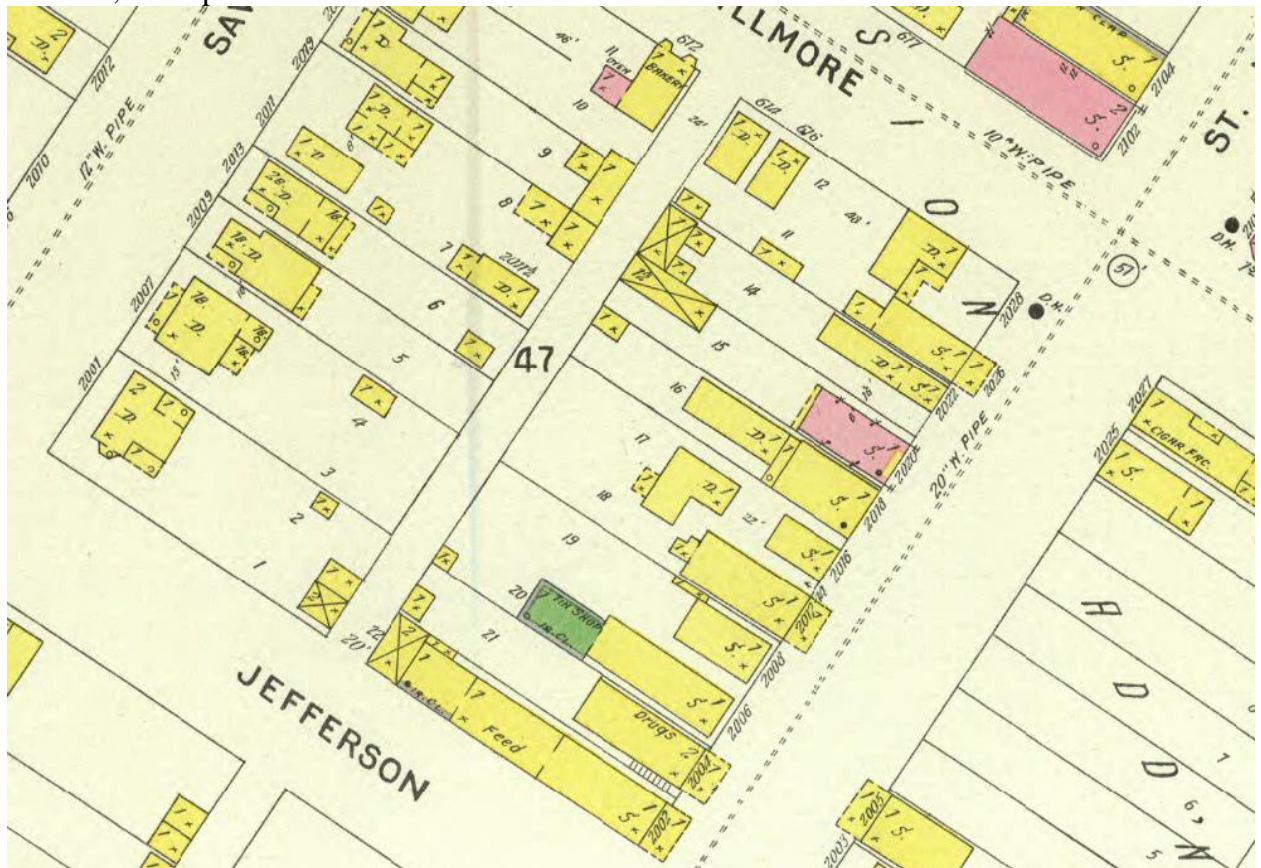


West side of the 2000 block of St. Joseph Ave.

From the beginning of its development, St. Joseph Avenue has been a fascinating mix of residential and commercial structures. Until about the 1970s, this was one of the most vibrant areas of the city with densely packed blocks housing a wide variety of businesses. Since the mid-70s, unfortunately most of the businesses have closed their doors and the avenue has become quite neglected.

If you were walking down the west side of the block in 1900 you would have passed a drug store, a doctor's office, a hardware store, two confectionaries, two meat markets, a barber shop, a shoe store, a watchmaker, and at the end (2028) a saloon. Over the decades the types of businesses remained quite stable. By 1940, the Regal Theater opened at 2010 and that same decade the Brown Bear Tavern opened at 2028.

In 2021 there are gaping holes in the once dense streetscape. The Regal Theater is still there – barely. And after taking a somewhat disheartening walk down the block you will be ready for a beer, so stop in at the Brown Bear!



1900 Sanborn Map showing the 2000 block of St. Joseph Avenue





